

Anteaters

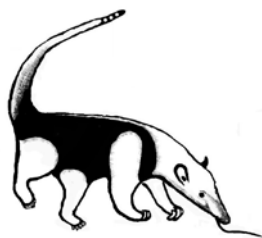
Local names: *tamandua*, *aj lu'tz*(in mopan), *tzu'zun*(in kek'chi), *anteater*, *antbear*, *oso hormiguero*, *oso amarillo*, *oso colmenero*, *brazo fuerte*, *chab*, *oso mielero*, *halep*

There are 4 species of anteaters all native to Central and South America:



1. **Giant anteaters** (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) are the largest anteaters, can weigh up to 65 lbs and can grow to more than 5 feet long (including their bushy tail). They are terrestrial, which means they live on the ground. Some people say that giant anteaters used to live in Belize, but became extinct.

2. **Silky anteaters** (*Cyclopes didactylus*) are the smallest anteaters known, weighing less than ½ a pound and grow to no more than 14 inches long. They are totally arboreal, which means they live in the trees. They live in Belize but it is hard to see them because they are most active at night, and it is hard to see them in the darkness high up on the trees.



3. **Southern tamanduas** (*Tamandua tetradactyla*) are medium size anteaters, can weigh up to 14 lbs, and can grow to 4 feet long (including their tail). They can be solid blonde in color, brown, or black, or have some black hair from the neck to the rump. They are arboreal most of the time, but sometimes will search for insects and grubs on the ground. They live in South America only.

4. **Northern tamanduas** (*Tamandua mexicana*) are the same size as southern tamanduas. They have brownish colored fur and have a distinct, black "V" going down their backs. They look like they are wearing a "vest" on their body that starts at the shoulders and ends at the rump. They are arboreal most of the time, but sometimes will search for insects and grubs on the ground. They live in Belize.



Myths (not true stories) about tamanduas:

- some people in Belize believe that tamanduas kill dogs by sticking their tongue in the dog's nose and choking it with their tail? THIS IS NOT TRUE.
- some people believe that tamanduas kill people in their sleep by sticking their tongue in the person's ear and sucking their brain out? THIS IS NOT TRUE.
- some people believe that tamanduas kill dogs by attacking them and cutting their heads off. This IS NOT TRUE.

Why do people make up those stories?



- Tamanduas are mostly active at night and they usually feed on ants and termites high on the trees, so it is hard to see them and understand their behavior. People fear things that they do not understand.
- If tamanduas get scared when they are on the ground, they do not run away like most wild animals do. They stand up on their back legs and use their tail to balance themselves, using their front claws to defend themselves. They do this when the dogs attack them, because they have no choice. Tamanduas fight only if they need to defend themselves.

Did you know?

- Tamanduas do not have teeth, but they have strong, muscular stomachs that can grind up ants and termites, instead of chewing them.

- Tamanduas use their strong claws to rip open the termite and ant nests, and then use their tongue to scoop up the ants and termites.

- All anteaters have long tongues covered with backwards pointing hairs, and coated with gooey saliva that helps to trap ants and termites.

- Tamanduas have very small mouth- it can only open to about the diameter of a pencil.

- Tamanduas have poor eyesight and rely mostly on smell. It is believed that their ability to smell is 40 times stronger than a human's.

- Tamanduas have four clawed toes on their front feet and five on their back feet. They walk on tough pads on the outer surfaces of their front feet that protect their sensitive feet.



- Female tamanduas give birth to a single baby, usually by the end of the dry season.

- Baby tamanduas stay with the mother for many months, riding on her back and clinging tightly to her fur, learning how to find food and to avoid predators.

- Tamanduas do not destroy the nests when they forage for ants and termites. They make an opening in the nest, eat for a few minutes and then move to the next nest. This gives the nests a chance to recover so the tamandua can come back to it on a regular basis.

-All anteaters, except the giant anteater, have prehensile tails, which means they can control it like monkeys do, allowing them to have a tight grip on branches while climbing trees.

- Some studies say that tamanduas need to eat up to 9,000 ants or termites per day.



Who are their main predators?

Tamanduas have some natural predators, such as big snakes, cats and large birds of prey, but the main threat comes from HUMANS:

- Tamanduas are killed on the roads by reckless drivers.

- Tamanduas are stoned by people because of fear and a lack of understanding.

- Tamanduas are killed by some for fun.

- Tamanduas are taken by hunters to keep or sell as pets.



Stoning, killing or keeping tamanduas and other anteaters as pets is against Belizean law.

Why is it a bad idea to have tamanduas as pets?

- It is illegal in Belize to keep any wildlife as pets.

- Tamanduas have the right to live in the wild. It is cruel to keep them in captivity.

- Tamanduas are very unusual animals and require a very special diet they can only find in the wild. Without that special diet and care, they usually die.

- Tamanduas are very strong and they will try to protect themselves- you can get hurt!

What should you do if you see an injured tamandua in the wild or a pet tamandua?

Call Wildlife Advice Hotline - DigiCell call 0800-822-8888 / Smart call 822-8888 / text 605-8888, or call Belize Forest Department at 822 1524 or 822 2079, or email tamanduarefuge@gmail.com